

Indicators of Abuse

Some indicators are highly suggestive of abuse but other are less so.

No list of indicators can be complete, and it is important in every case to consider the child or vulnerable adult's experience of living in their family and the other things that are happening in their life.

If a child has suffered one kind of abuse, the likelihood of suffering another kind is increased.

Sometimes children will tell you they are being abused.

Sometimes you will notice a cluster of things which worry you and may be indicators.

Possible signs of abuse

Sexual abuse

- Sexualised drawings, play or language
- Sudden poor performance at school, reluctance to change for PE or swimming etc, fear of returning home
- Sudden poor performance at work, reluctance to change clothes in public changing rooms, fear of returning home
- Low self-esteem, suicidal gestures, self harm, running away, eating disorders, sleep disturbance
- Promiscuity, confusion as to the abuse
- Withdrawn and depressed
- Bruising around the knees, thighs, bottom, genitalia and upper arms (often symmetrical, suggesting grip marks)
- Mouth injuries, cigarette and other burns/bite marks
- Injuries, infections, bleeding, abnormal discharge in the genital or anal area
- Pregnancy – particularly when concealed or where the father is unidentified
- Soiling and wetting

Physical Abuse

- Withdrawal from physical contact or close relationships with adults and children, be apprehensive when other children cry
- Frightened of going home, show reluctance for parent/carer/significant other to be contacted or appear to be frightened by a particular person
- Being aggressive to others
- Reluctance to undress in public, for PE or swimming, or wearing long sleeved tops or trousers consistently (including in hot weather)
- Refusal to discuss or give improbable causes for injuries
- The repeated presentation of minor injuries or illnesses, often to the GP or A&E, which may represent a 'cry for help'
- Serious injuries like fractures and breaks

Emotional and Psychological abuse

- A persons responses to the person hurt by abuse may also give cause for concern, such as:

- Scapegoating
- Leaving the person out of normal activities and encouraging others to respond to the child in this way
- Indifference to the person's needs, hostility, ridicule, sarcasm, deliberately frightening the person
- Deliberately withholding or forcing a person to 'earn' basics like food, clothes, drink and warmth
- Physical, mental and emotional developmental delay or disturbance
- Domestic violence, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse
- Sudden speech disorders, over-reaction to mistakes, fear of new situations, inappropriate responses to stressful situations
- Self harm, low self esteem, inability to play
- Compulsive stealing, scavenging for food

Neglect and acts of omission

- Poor personal hygiene, poor state of clothing
- Constant tiredness, untreated medical problems
- Poor physical condition, emaciation, failure to thrive, without an organic reason
- Frequent lateness and non-attendance at school, poor intellectual development, underachieving
- Repeated or frequent accidents due to low levels of, or inadequate, supervision
- Inadequate or inappropriate diet, poor skin and hair condition, slow to heal sores etc
- Signs of emotional abuse, low self esteem, attention seeking behaviour, no social relationships, isolation